

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
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USINT BAGHDAD
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USMISSION SINAI
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 10676

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EG, UR, XF, LY
SUBJECT: EGYPTIAN-LIBYAN BORDER CLASH: INITIAL SOVIET REACTIONS

SUMMARY: THE INITIAL SOVIET REACTIONS ON THE EGYPTIAN-LIBYAN BORDER CLASH INDICATE THAT THE SOVIETS ARE DISTURBED OVER THE INCIDENT BUT ARE AVOIDING, AT LEAST INITIALLY, A STRONG ANTI-EGYPTIAN STANCE. SHOULD THE CONFLICT CONTINUE OR BROADEN, THE SOVIETS WILL PROBABLY GIVE THE LIBYANS THE BENEFIT OF ANY DOUBT.
END SUMMARY.

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1. THE FIRST SOVIET RESPONSE WAS A SHORT ITEM CARRIED ON TASS WIRE JULY 22 FROM NEW YORK REPORTING UNSYG WALDHEIM'S EXPRESSION OF SERIOUS CONCERN OVER THE ARMED CLASH ON THE EGYPTIAN-LIBYAN BORDER. THIS WAS FOLLOWED IMMEDIATELY BY A CAIRO DATELINED ONE-SENTENCE ITEM REPORTING THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF AN EGYPTIAN MILITARY SPOKESMAN THAT

A BORDER CLASH TOOK PLACE ON JULY 21. NO COMMENT ATTRIBUTABLE TO EITHER EGYPT OR TASS WAS INCLUDED. THE THIRD TASS ITEM IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE FIRST TWO WAS FROM TRIPOLI AND REPORTED THAT EGYPTIAN ARMED FORCES HAD CAPTURED THE LIBYAN BORDER VILLAGE OF MUSAAD AND BOMBED THE POPULATED LOCALITY OF BARDIYA. THIS PIECE WENT ON TO CITE A LIBYAN "OFFICIAL REPRESENTATIVE" WHO STRESSED THAT THE EGYPTIAN LEADERSHIP MUST BEAR ALL THE RESPONSIBILITIES IN CONNECTION WITH THIS ACT. PRAVDA JULY 23 PRINTS A FURTHER TASS-CAIRO ITEM WHICH ANNOUNCES THE ARAFAT PEACE MISSION.

2. PRAVDA JULY 23 ALSO CARRIES (ONE DAY LATE) ITS ANNIVERSARY ARTICLE BY P. DEMCHYENKO COMMEMORATING THE 1952 EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION AND IZVESTIYA HAS A SIMILAR COMMENTARY THE EVENING OF JULY 22 BY ITS SENIOR MIDDLE EAST COMMENTATOR, VLADIMIR KUDRYAVTSEV. BOTH ARE SET PIECES WHICH PRAISE THE NASSER YEARS AND THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE EGYPTIANS (WITH THE COOPERATION WITH THE SOVIETS) IN THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD. KUDRYAVTSEV WRITES THAT THE "ANTI-FEUDAL AND ANTI-IMPERIALIST NATURE OF THE REVOLUTION "HAS NOT DIMINISHED IN ANY WAY," THUS SUGGESTING INDIRECTLY THAT SOVIETS DO NOT CONSIDER SADAT IRREDEEMABLY LOST TO THE "PROGRESSIVE" FORCES.

3. BOTH DEMCHYENKO AND KUDRYAVTSEV COMMENT ON THE RECENT FAHMI VISIT TO MOSCOW IN CAREFUL, BUT POSITIVE, TERMS, AND
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URGE THAT "BILATERAL EFFORTS" (PRAVDA) BE TAKEN AND THAT A READINESS BE SHOWN FOR "PRACTICAL, CONSTRUCTIVE STEPS" (IZVESTIYA). THE SOVIET UNION, THEY STATE, IS READY TO DO ITS PART. THE OVERALL IMPRESSIONS FROM THE ARTICLES IS THAT OF SOVIET MODERATION TOWARDS SADAT DESPITE THE BORDER INCIDENT.

4. THE USUAL LEVEL AND NUMBER OF SOVIET MILITARY IN ATTENDANCE AT THE EGYPTIAN NATIONAL DAY RECEPTION JULY 22 (SEE MOSCOW DAO IR 6 901 0732 77 OF JULY 23, 1977) ALSO SUGGEST THAT FOR THE MOMENT THE SOVIETS DO NOT INTEND TO REACT STRONGLY AGAINST THE EGYPTIANS.

5. COMMENT: THE UNUSUAL JUXAPOSITION OF THE FIRST THREE TASS PIECES PROVIDES SOME INSIGHT INTO THE SOVIET PERSPECTIVES ON THE OUTBREAK OF FIGHTING BETWEEN THE EGYPTIANS AND THE LIBYANS. THEIR FIRST REACTION IS THAT OF CONCERN, EXPRESSED IN THE WORDS OF UNSYD WOLDHEIM. SECONDLY, THE SOVIETS ARE SHOWING THAT THEY WILL BE CORRECT TOWARDS THE EGYPTIANS, AT LEAST INITIALLY, BUT THAT THEY WILL SUPPORT THE LIBYANS AND WILL PLACE THE BLAME ON THE EGYPTIANS FOR THE OUTBREAK. THE QUICK REPORTING BY PRAVDA JULY 23 OF THE ARAFAT MISSION

AND OF THE BOUMEDIENE EFFORTS (PRAVDA JULY 25) INDICATES THAT THE SOVIETS ARE FAVORABLY DISPOSED TOWARDS A SETTLEMENT OF SOME KIND. WERE IT NOT FOR THE BORDER FIGHTING, THE TWO PICES MARKING THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE EGYPTIAN REVOLUTION COULD BE CONSIDERED AS STANDARD. HOWEVER, THE FACT THAT THEY BOTH FOLLOW THE RECENT LINE OF MILD CRITICISM OF THE EGYPTIAN REGIME WITH THE OFFER OF POSSIBLE REESTABLISHMENT OF GOOD RELATIONS, INDICATES FURTHER THAT THE SOVIETS ARE NOT REACTING SHARPLY AGAINST SADAT AT THIS TIME. HOWEVER, SHOULD THE QADAFHI REGIME BECOME SERIOUSLY THREATENED BY THE BORDER SITUATION, WE WOULD EXPECT THE SOVIETS WOULD FEEL COMPELLED TO MOVE MORE STRONGLY TO SUPPORT HIM WITH POLITICAL AND PERHAPS MILITARY ASSISTANCE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
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Channel Indicators: n/a
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977MOSCOW10676
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
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Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
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Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
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Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
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Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1760611
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EGYPTIAN-LIBYAN BORDER CLASH: INITIAL SOVIET REACTIONS SUMMARY: THE INITIAL SOVIET REACTIONS ON THE EGYPTIAN-LIBYAN BORDER CLASH INDICATE THAT THE SOVIETS ARE
TAGS: PBOR, EG, UR, XF, LY
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/45ca8264-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009